To stand sitting! Reflections on weaving our living stories - the NZAP conference in Napier

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Abstract

This paper was written as a way of making sense of my experience as the conductor of the large group. In taking on this role I assume that I am expected to pay attention to all communications including receiving and digesting those that are not yet consciously acknowledged. The hope is that by taking this position, unacknowledged painful material can be contained until the group is ready to receive it in a less toxic form just as Winnicott described the 'good-enough' mother providing for her baby. Timing is essential to the process so is an ongoing relationship. In the large group the intention is that most people will eventually grasp the 'social soup' (Solomon, 2006, p. 56.) that unconsciously restricts and influences their lives.

In this conference the large group was a central experience and touched some deep and painful places. The aim was to provide an opportunity to weave our living stories together as a way of encountering our bicultural history together. As the time we had was so short, I found it difficult to make sense of what was happening there and then. Consequently it became almost imperative for me to find a way of understanding the experience afterwards. The more I thought and worked with the material, the clearer it became to me that this large group appeared to manifest aspects of the shameful colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand. What emerged from what was said and enacted gave some clues about what Volkan has called 'the chosen trauma'. Strong feelings connected to what Māori 'thought they gave and what the coloniser claimed' has been unconsciously transmitted through the generations as a result of this original 'abyss' (Walker, 1990, p. 96) of misunderstandings inextricably linked to the Treaty of Waitangi

As I describe this process, I introduce some theoretical ideas about projective identification and its role in transmitting trauma across the generations through the social unconscious, the role of the conductor in group-analytic large groups, scapegoating and some thoughts about our journey towards a more authentic bicultural position in NZAP. I am very aware that my role as both an outsider, coming from the UK, and an insider, having grown up in New Zealand as an immigrant, places me in a unique position symbolically. Throughout the paper I refer to myself as the 'Representative of the Crown'. In this symbolic role, I was enabled to take in three different experiences, how it feels to be an immigrant now, how it feels to be a colonised people in your own land and how it feels to be a descendent of those original colonising invaders. What emerged felt unspeakably painful so I hope this paper can be read as a step in acknowledging our 'difficult difference' (Wedde 2005).

Stumbling on a metaphor

As I digest this powerful and overwhelming experience I am in the Bay of Islands at my mother's spending most of my waking hours clearing her front garden. It is almost totally overgrown with jasmine. This sweet-smelling import has over the years buried and almost strangled what lies underneath. As I reveal about ten clumps of flax and enjoy watching the newly released blades whisper in the wind, I contemplate the many baskets I could now weave. I take pleasure in carefully cutting the dead blades near the roots with a lovingly constructed outwards slope so the rain will run off leaving the 'mother and father' to guard the 'soft little child' growing in the centre. Next I uncover a beautiful old oak tree grown from an acorn, standing proud. As I peel off the curtains of jasmine that had cloaked her branches for years I reflect on how it seemed right at the time for my mother to plant it as a memory of her birth country, Britain. I reflect that it is also a symbol of British Imperialism.

Then I notice many clumps of privet, that ubiquitous English garden hedging plant, which is now a forbidden weed here in NZ. At the same time as I pull and cut, the splendour that lies beneath slowly emerges and I reflect on the large group and the experience of attempting to weave our living stories together. It is as if I am pulling away the years of Pākehā[1] blindness to Māori life that is lived here in NZ. Something profound has been covered with years of nice sweet smelling creeper that has been strangling what lies beneath.

Discovering a 'gap' in understanding

At my first conference in 2004, I had felt a deep unease about the relationship between Māori and Pākehā in NZAP. There, it was played out around the Powhiri[2] and it continued to reverberate throughout the conference in the large group. On the first evening, a light supper had been laid out in preparation for the completion of the powhiri. Many participants arrived late having chosen not to take part and seeing the delicious food on the tables started to eat before it had been blessed and before those who had been there earlier were ready to eat.

Initially the only way I could think about what happened was to see it as a 'gap' in knowledge and understanding. I felt it again in Queenstown during the Forum. The air seemed to freeze when biculturalism was mentioned. It appeared that nobody really wanted to talk openly about what they felt. I am beginning to recognise that something more complicated might be happening connected to a buried pain that has lived on since the early encounter between Māori and Pākehā. I sense on-going unease about how it feels to be Māori in a predominantly Pākehā culture and how it feels for Pākehā to live with

the constant reminder of the shame associated with their early colonising enterprise. As Wedde (2001, p.109) points out,

> indigeneity is constructed by colonialism, by occupation and subjugation, by the establishment and reification of difference between native or autochthonous roots and immigrant and diasporic routes. How do we define home without remarginalising many indigenous people whose land tenure has been complicated or fragmented by colonialism, ecological transformations, urbanisation and globalisation?

What seems to be happening in these mutual encounters at NZAP conferences is a form of projective identification[3] that unconsciously communicates something that cannot yet be talked about. I am beginning to comprehend that in every new encounter between Māori and Pākehā there is likely to be a resonance with the early colonising encounters.

When I took part in the whakawatea[4] hui[5] last October with the organising committee, this powerful projective identification was duplicated in relation to me as the newcomer from overseas. It was my first such experience of Māori tikanga[6] and much as I tried to navigate the process I could not be sure of what was expected of me. I felt raw and confused. From the beginning, I was confronted with expressions in Te Reo[7] Māori that I did not understand so when I asked where Ngati Porou[8] was in NZ and was told that I would have to find out. I knew I was in for a rough ride. It was a sharp retort and felt unnecessarily aggressive but I recognised the communication that came with it. I understood that Māori were tired of helping Pākehā to understand their worldview. My internal thought and feeling processes went into overdrive as I was plunged into a similar yawning 'gap' to the one I described earlier. This time I felt on my own and was floundering. Much as I tried I could not find the words to bridge the differences. This inability to meet what I was confronted with propelled me into contemplating very deeply what was happening. The whole experience stayed with me and I held it very much in mind over the months approaching the conference.

That October meeting was my first experience of mihi[9]. I had no way of knowing what was expected of me so I could only introduce myself in my way. I decided to be open and to tell the group something of my life experiences, many of them painful that had led me to come to the place where I now stood looking forward to being the large group conductor for the conference. Although I learnt that this meeting was intended as a place where we would prepare the way for the work ahead, I was disappointed that we did not have time to talk about the proposed format a little more. I was concerned that the large group space would not be understood and that the hui might be

obliterated so I suggested that the conference be structured with both hui, managed in accordance with Māori protocol that took as long as they took and large groups that were time-bound and conducted according to group-analytic principles. I wanted the structure to reflect the two cultures, to be bi-cultural. In a continued effort to form a bridge over what I felt was another 'gap in understanding' I emailed my thoughts over the months in between and came to a better place of knowing and understanding. But, this 'gap' continued to haunt me. Despite all my efforts I could not find a way to cross it and, as I feared, we had this same 'gap' to grapple with in the conference.

The structure we did have was different to the one I had envisaged and initially, it did not feel bicultural. I learnt as we went along that it was deeply evolved and bicultural but in a different way. The organising committee of this conference, itself bicultural, actively worked with their differences and developed their ideas through deep discussion, shared experience and even a hikoi[10]. Māori tikanga book-ended four storytellers and four group-analytic large groups. The Powhiri that opened our encounter was a powerful welcome to us all, warm and embracing. We had a wonderful sit-down dinner together afterwards but then the 'gap' reasserted itself. According to the programme, the rest of the evening was to be spent in whakawhanaungatanga[11]. But more than half the participants disappeared! It is true that they were given permission to leave but why did so many people take it and why was the Māori facilitator so generous? As I understood it, this session was an integral part of the conference and yet almost half the participants chose to avoid it. I am still puzzled that this absence was never commented on. It was almost as though the whakawhanaungatanga and the poroporoake[12], when many people also disappeared, had no importance to many Pākehā. It felt insulting.

The conference structure turned out to be more subtle than my vision had been. In many ways, it was more courageous because it was designed to use the strengths available from both cultures. I suspect that the delicate juxtaposition of the two modes led to a lack of respect for both that painfully forced us to face a confusion about what it really means to be Māori and what it really means to be Pākehā. Perhaps this confusion has been avoided up until now. In the event it appears that the 'gap' between the two was too wide to cross but as a result of struggling both in and with the group, what had been buried burst into the open and continues as I write.

Something strange happened to me on that first evening that I now realise resonated with what was to follow. As I do not speak any Te Reo Māori I did not understand how fulsomely I had been welcomed in the powhiri. It was not until the dinner dance the following night, that it was explained that I

had been welcomed as a kind of magician. I then understood that when I was welcomed again later that same evening during the opening dinner, it was as if the original powhiri welcome had not happened. In a way there was no need for the second welcome and the unintentional doubling-up reflected the same 'gap' that I was being asked to hold.

I should have known when I was invited to sing God Save the Queen as my Waiata[13] in the Whakawhanaungatanga on that first evening who I would stand for in the large group but at that point, it was too painful to take in. I remember feeling hurt and bewildered. Despite receiving an email just prior to the conference explaining that I needed to prepare for what was to happen on that first evening, I did not understand it. I had no context of experience to help me comprehend what this 'building a relationship' expected of me so I could not have understood that I should have prepared a song to sing. It was another example of the 'gap' manifesting itself.

In my head was something quite different to the performed pieces that each group presented. On reflection, I wonder were we really preparing the way for the work we were about to embark on or were we engaging in an as-if process that sought to soak up anxiety? It reminded me of the Māori concert parties of my youth that really did little to engage the visitor with the deep experience and challenge of the Māori world-view. I was also disappointed to discover that the German pre-conference workshop leader had disappeared. I had expected him to stay so we could join forces as 'overseas people'. I felt uncomfortable being labelled British but events always conspire to happen in the way that they must. I have learnt to be prepared to work with whatever it is that emerges.

On not hearing and not being heard

There are many reasons for not understanding or hearing. I have already alluded to the perception that I represented 'the Crown', which is difficult enough territory in a tranquil situation, but the atmosphere did not feel calm. It felt as though we were about to embark on our journey together just as a raging storm was threatening to break. I decided to proceed very carefully but despite my attempts to be as gentle as possible I was, not surprisingly, perceived, by at least a few, as an overseas know-all who was insensitive to the NZ way of doing things. Given the tension induced by the bicultural aim of this conference, it was not surprising that I was misheard. Fighting about whether to sit or stand now feels like a way of communicating 'how it feels to have a visitor from the Crown'. Perhaps the experiences associated with being both coloniser and colonised were more urgent than facing all

the other painful differences in the room. There was something about my experience of feeling as though I was being treated as an unwanted outsider throughout that replicated something about the experience associated with the early missionary encounter in Aotearoa[14] New Zealand. It is interesting to note that I did not ever instruct anybody to sit down but the group behaved as though I had! In this 'not hearing or understanding' I sensed something deeper. I now believe it encoded the original cultural trauma of not being heard or understood. In response, hoping for some shared reflection on the experience in the room, I kept saying that the group was for learning to talk to each other in a social setting and not a place for public speaking. My hope was that we might give up trying to engage in a continuous stream of monologues delivered to the group-as-a-whole and instead try to create an atmosphere in which dialogue with each other as individuals could begin.

I soon realised that I felt as though I was in a war that was being waged in secret. It should have been no surprise because it might well have been a reflection of what has been going on in Aotearoa New Zealand since Pākehā arrived but it hardly surfaced directly. Instead it was as though a diversionary skirmish about whether to sit or stand was engaged in. Symbolically the bicultural discomfort was deflected on to me. The large group became the cause for concern rather than the evident disquiet about biculturalism. In a way I became the missionary invader representing 'the Crown' who had to be warded off and the group the invaded indigenous Māori and Pākehā pioneers who wanted to be left alone to get on with their lives. Any pre-existing differences were forgotten. Much of the time I sat with knowing that to confront the dispute more openly might have further inflamed the situation. It needed more time.

By making the large group an 'as if hui' and putting me symbolically in the place of 'the Crown', it enabled many to align themselves alongside Māori. The 'gap' as a result of the 'difficult difference' (Wedde 2005) between cultures was conflated so that the accompanying inevitable unease did not have to be thought about. Pākehā were then freed from having to openly negotiate their differences with each other and with Māori in the room. Instead I became the conduit through which those differences got aired. There was only one exception to this rule and that was when a kaumātua[15] was told to sit down and stop talking by a Pākehā woman and we immediately saw how upset everybody got. But, was it about one kaumātua being shamed in the group or was it about what Pākehā have done to Māori through colonisation?

I have discovered that some people believe that cultural conflict can be solved within the family. Many do have one parent who identifies as Pākehā

and another as Māori but perhaps it is too painful to acknowledge the legacy of colonial history that often exists behind closed doors. Can we dare to acknowledge the widespread domestic oppression in New Zealand as well as its more evident demonstration in society? We all witnessed the deep wailing from the guts that expressed so much historical pent-up pain and yet we did not talk about it despite there being relief for those who could dare to believe they would truly be heard.

In a large group it is important to remember that every time a person speaks they not only speak for themselves but also for where the group is at the time. So, when a kaumātua, is interrupted abruptly, it can be viewed as the voice of Pākehā expressing their impatience with Māori and when Māori get angry about a kaumātua's mana[16] being insulted and shamed by Pākehā, they are also speaking for the generations of insults that Pākehā have perpetrated. Ranginui Walker (1990) describes the way the word mana was deliberately mistranslated in the Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi because the missionaries had a vested interest in maintaining their substantial landholdings (ibid p. 91). The real meaning of the Treaty was concealed by imprecise translation of this word mana. What the chiefs thought they were giving the crown and what the coloniser claimed, were separated by an abyss that was to have cataclysmic consequences for the Māori people (ibid p. 96). These huge social forces have been buried for nearly 170 years and were gradually and agonizingly being uncovered in the group. I now see that the 'gap' I kept feeling is probably the same as this abyss in the original 'agreement' in the Treaty of Waitangi. And, as we were forcefully told by a Māori kuia[17], being sorry is not enough, neither is 'bleating'. "We have had the tangi[18], now get on with it!" This abyss or 'gap' cannot be crossed by just saying sorry but by taking responsibility for thinking about how to do it differently now.

Earlier in the conference, we were asked, "Were Māori really welcomed into NZAP?" It resulted in a long and difficult discussion, which one participant continued with me over dinner that evening. I observed that it seemed that a very rigid European mindset had been imported and dressed up in words like rigorous and ethical as a justification for its application in the South Pacific. What might have worked in the UK thirty years ago may not work in Aotearoa New Zealand now. I wondered would it be possible to weave our differences and have the courage to evolve a particularly Aotearoa New Zealand journey to membership? I know that there are creative examples of weaving these two ways of living together that are world-renowned. Both open adoption and family group conferencing evolved from Māori tradition (Lupton[19], 1995 and Maxwell, 1983). Perhaps the focus on feeling excluded

from NZAP was a way of talking about how it also feels to be excluded from Pākehā-dominated New Zealand society now. What are the forces that either, lead us to ignore those traditions as irrelevant or, to take on Māori traditions as though we have none of our own? The 'gap' between us gets swallowed up and leaves no space between to think about how our different world-views might be negotiated.

The situation here in Aotearoa New Zealand reminds me a little of the situation in post war West Germany where in the immediate aftermath of World War Two 1945 became known as the 'Stunde Null'[20]. It was a way of 'forgetting' the horror of what had gone before. Since then there has been an awakening for subsequent generations, as they have become adults and asked questions. The pain of not forgetting has been so agonizing for many people they have become Jewish to assuage their guilt for the Holocaust. In 2000 Tariana Turia spoke to the NZ Psychological Association and shocked many New Zealanders when she referred to what has happened to Māori as akin to the Holocaust. In summary she said that since the first colonial contact, much effort has been invested in attempts to individualise Māori with the introduction of numerous assimilationist policies and laws to alienate them from their social structures linked to the guardianship and occupation of the land. As Turia explains the consequence of this colonial oppression has been the internalisation by Māori of the images the oppressor has of them. The psychological consequences of internalising such negative images means that oppressed people take in the illusion of the oppressors' power while still feeling helpless and despairing so that self-hatred and, for many, suicide is the only possible outcome (Turia, 2000).

On not muddling the concrete with the symbolic or daring to be different

Staying with traumatic pain is extremely uncomfortable as I discovered again after this conference. My own history as the daughter of a Jewish refugee makes it impossible for me to 'forget' so I was forced to continue thinking about what had emerged. As I found myself unable to ignore the feelings left inside me, I was constantly preoccupied with the legacy of colonisation and set out on a search for books that would help me to look critically at our different his-stories. Now I can see how much of the enactment in the group was evoked by and in turn evoked the lost fragments of Aotearoa New Zealand's turbulent history if we could only have seen it more clearly at the time. We took on an ambitious task and although I felt that there was insufficient space to adequately digest and reflect on the material as it emerged, I suspect that the feeling of not having enough time or space might be an emergent trace

from the original colonising experience of being taken over.

Unfortunately the many differences in the community seemed to get reduced into an opposition of you and us. Perhaps to engage in another way would have felt just too devastating. Ian Wedde (2005) describes the necessity to engage with difficult difference so we can imaginatively inhabit, be incorporated in and embody the histories of others. Then our tolerance will mean something: it will mark, not obscure, difference. But perhaps, what happened tells me that the pain of being abandoned by mother Britain when it went into the common market on top of the 'double crossing' enshrined in the Treaty of Waitangi is still being felt and influencing life in the present.

When a Kaumātua gets 'wiped out' by a Pākehā woman, it is an event that reminds us of the forgotten historical story that most Māori got 'wiped out' when Pākehā came to New Zealand. Although this 'shutting-up' in the group was real, it had a symbolic component. It was reversed at the Auckland Branch meeting a week later when I was symbolically 'wiped out' at the end of the group. By giving the last ten or fifteen minutes to the Kaumātua, I was not given the space to end the group as I would usually. In this move the group demonstrated that it is almost impossible for Pākehā and Māori to stand together on an equal footing and for them both to hold their mana in all its fullness. Either, what a Kaumātua represents gets told to sit down and shut up or, what I represent gets silenced! Being unable to confront this difficult difference leaves us in a position where it becomes impossible for Māori and Pākehā, men and women, to stand together side by side and both be acknowledged in all their power at the same time. The mana of either Pākehā or Māori is destroyed so somebody has to hold the 'gap' or the abyss of misunderstanding as in the original mistranslation of the meaning of mana in the Treaty of Waitangi.

I now recognise that ever since my first encounter with the conference committee it was this uncomfortable dilemma that I had been asked to hold. It reveals 'the chosen trauma' (Volkan, 2002, p. 465) that has been carried in the social unconscious ever since New Zealand's inception as a British colony. Earl Hopper describes the way trauma transmits itself to the present through what he calls equivalence. Like the repetition compulsion, it is an unconscious attempt to communicate through projective identification, in the socio-political domain, the non-verbal and ineffable experience of the original trauma. It can also be seen as a kind of group-transference of an original social context to the present situation (Hopper. 2001, p.13). De Maré (1991) describes the way whole situations get 'transposed'.

Ranginui Walker's description of the early encounters between Māori and

Pākehā make for harrowing reading. According to him, Māori were double-crossed at every turn as missionaries and English upper-class landowners and merchants sought to exploit the land for their own capitalistic gain (ibid p. 89). The Māori world-view was also subjugated by incoming Europeans with a further assumption that theirs was a superior culture that was then built into the institutions of the new society (Walker, 1986, p. 85).

This cultural trauma is there and lives on everyday in Aotearoa New Zealand but is usually avoided so of course once the lid came off the bottle, it all came wooshing out. Time needs to be given to thinking together to understand and work it through. Perhaps it will become more and more possible, for more and more people, to keep using the open space of the large group to share stories, mourn and together begin to recognise how this trauma has destructively embedded itself into the culture of Aotearoa.

Without knowing our history we cannot know who we are. When Māori describe standing on solid ground on the marae[21] they know that they have a turangawaewae[22] where they belong and have a right to speak. Without that kind of safe place it is difficult to know who we are. I have discovered that many Pākehā do not really know where they have come from or what their ancestors did. Last year in Auckland in the large group, organised by the Hakanoa group, we discovered that very many people in the community have lost their histories. Along with the many painful memories that were left behind on the other side of the world came a loss of context to inform descendants' experiences. 'God's own', as it was often called, was a place of hope for the future for immigrants but their descendents were often severed from their roots. Without knowing our whakapapa, it is too unsafe to stand the guilt and shame of what might have been done in our name. Just as many Germans, unable to tolerate the guilt of their history became philosemitic, I observed many Pākehā take on Māori tikanga as if it were their own. One example is when Pākehā join the mihi, I notice that many introduce themselves as if they were Māori in Te Reo alluding to connections to the land that do not exist for Pākehā in the same way.

I recognise that it takes enormous courage to learn a new language and how much more it takes to speak it within the hearing of those for whom it is their mother tongue. I also know how enabling it is to borrow a simple formula to help frame one's early attempts but with Te Reo Māori I think we have to be careful. In the mihi Māori introduce themselves according to their whakapapa and their relationship with the land. For Pākehā the physical landscape does not define our identity as much as other historical experiences and we do not introduce ourselves in relation to the land. By taking the content along

with the form of the mihi, and substituting rivers and mountains as if they were intimately connected to our identity, we inadvertently repeat the original misconstruction about our relationship to the land and sea enshrined in the Treaty. There, mana was intentionally substituted for kāwanatanga[23] in the Te Reo version and, according to Walker (ibid, p. 91), led Māori to give up their mana to the Queen, something they had no intention of doing. When we Pākehā introduce ourselves by repeating this pattern, we not only deny our difference but we also insult Māori sensitivities to the land. Perhaps instead we could learn to take a tiny step. Perhaps we could discover what is important about our history and learn how to express that in Te Reo in the mihi. In this way perhaps it becomes possible to find a true meeting of cultures.

In these situations, I am always reminded of the MacPherson report, written after a huge enquiry into racism in the UK police force. It makes the point very clearly that to deny difference is a form of racism. As Pākehā we have a responsibility to face our history and take ownership of it. Perhaps there is a fear that if we don't do exactly as the other, we might not be accepted or we might have to cope with being inadvertently rude or have to face our inborn racism. Standing to be different can be painful.

Making sense of the large group

I was intrigued to discover Robert Sullivan (2005, p. 13) quoting Professor Ngapare Hopa, Head of Māori Studies at the University of Auckland describing the ubiquitous spiral that weaves in and out of traditional Māori art and reveals a worldview where opposites can converge and where knowledge is not a linear progression. The spiral can also represent genealogy and embody potentiality. As the roots of the large group go right back to the dawn of civilisation it embodies a similar or parallel world-view. It operates much like a spiral repeatedly passing over the same material but each time it is seen from a different perspective. The process is not immediately logical or linear but needs to be tolerated before a deeper, embedded logic can emerge. It takes time, patience and the capacity to manage a good deal of anxiety and frustration but emerge it does, eventually. I often think of it rather like the beginning of creation. Physicists now think that the universe emerged out of nothing after a gradual gathering of matter together that slowly formed itself. The process of developing dialogue in the large group is not dissimilar.

When we meet in large gatherings most people are used to a system of rules and protocols. Either an agenda and codes for speaking are used or a talk is given that the audience can respond to. In Aotearoa New Zealand many people have experienced a Māori hui before they have experienced a large

group. Despite many theorists believing that the large group facilitates a true form of democracy, the idea of sitting in a circle and just allowing whatever is in our minds to emerge and to think together about that without an agenda is, for most people, unusual. The conductor does not make the rules apart from preparing the times for meeting and the space apart from an expectation that everyone sit in their chairs. So, a structure is set, with the organisation of time space and chairs so that an on-the level dialogue can take place. Any other rules are developed, often painfully, by the group through dialogue as its own culture forms and as individuals in the group find their own voice.

The large group is a difficult place that provokes enormous anxiety but this is a state that I have learnt few people are willing to acknowledge particularly in social settings. Admitting to feeling vulnerable and scared often appears to be too difficult so instead of acknowledging this natural response, these feelings get subsumed into an atmosphere of anger and criticism that becomes extremely persecutory. It takes time, practice and hard work to get beyond the initial overwhelming confusion and emotional power of the large group to begin to confront one's own worst demons but in the end it brings its own particular reward. If we can take courage, it can release the individual out of a fuzzy focus of not quite knowing who they are into a sharp identity. At the same time, it can produce enormous creativity and reveal what lurks unseen in the socio-political context in ways that can seem unthinkable.

Frustration is inevitable. Patrick de Maré (1991) developed the theory of the large group based on the idea that we need to channel our frustration and hatred into energy for thinking, which is not a natural process but a social skill that has to be learned. He believed that it is through learning to think together that we can change the world.

Dialogue is a word that is often used and thought of as a good thing'. But, it is easier said than done! Canetti (2000, p. 15-16) points out that there is nothing we fear more than the touch of the unknown. It is only when we surrender to and feel at one with a crowd, when we are so squeezed that we don't know who it is that touches us, when distinctions between self and other are lost, when we feel as one body, that this fear of touch is lost. Asking individuals in a group, many of who have never experienced it in this way before, to resist this comforting tendency of merging with the whole was asking almost too much. I am reminded of watching a group of people visiting London from Papua New Guinea for the first time being asked to go up on the London Eye to see London. The idea that they would be safe so far above the ground was beyond comprehension. I knew that I was dealing with a similar incomprehension so I tried many times and in many ways to explain

my approach and what would be expected. I had written a short piece that was published both on the website and in the programme. I also talked a little at the first dinner and then again at the beginning of the first group.

What I bring is the intention to sit in a circle to use the space to learn to talk to each other despite the enormous anxiety the setting inevitably induces. I knew that, apart from a very small number of people, few had any previous history of this experience. My words could not be understood in the spirit in which they were spoken so I tried to keep it very simple in the hope that we would all learn together through the experience. In the beginning the large group demands a certain amount of trust or at least the capacity to challenge the conductor so that trust can develop but unfortunately in Napier, it seemed that for many, neither prospect was an option. When so many people had only experienced a big group gathering as a hui with its Māori protocol, any other approach seemed outside of awareness or possibility. I knew that and was prepared to accept what would happen.

When I suggested that the large group was a sacred space, I was asking people who didn't understand its protocol to respect it and treat it with care hoping that in time they may come to recognise what it can deliver. It like the hui, takes a while to learn and make use of. I guess the way my explanation was not understood mirrored my own incomprehension about how to manage Māori protocol as I experienced it. A first time is always without context so it creates that gap in understanding and is confusing. We get it wrong; we get upset, reflect on the whole experience and learn for next time.

Group-analysis, the social unconscious and the matrix

I realise that I may use expressions, in particular, group-analysis, the social unconscious and the matrix, that are not commonly used in Aotearoa New Zealand. I noticed repeatedly in the group that psychoanalysis was referred to as though it was some terrible disease that I was infecting NZAP with. Although group-analysis, like many therapies was developed by a psychoanalyst, it is not psychoanalysis. I didn't bring that particular disease but perhaps it was another! S. H. Foulkes[24] decided after noticing his clients talking to each other in the waiting room that he might as well get them together in a group. He described group-analysis as a form of working in groups that is 'by the group, for the group, including its conductor' in which everybody including the conductor develop the ability to communicate and listen to each other in a non-judgemental, free-floating, non-directive and non-manipulative way. "In learning to communicate, the group can be compared with a child learning to speak" (Foulkes and Anthony, 1968, p. 263). In contrast to other forms of

group work where it is either the group or the individual that is kept in focus, group-analysis has a multi-level approach that holds in mind individuals, the group and the relationship between the two all at the same time. Foulkes, who came out of the Frankfurt School, used the Gestalt idea of figure and ground to describe the relationship between these three moving elements of the group where each can be representative of or give meaning to the other. In the larger group it is not usual for the conductor to interpret but it is important to help the group and individuals make sense of what is happening when the time feels right and new thoughts can be taken in.

Foulkes developed his concept of the matrix to extend the idea that what happens in the group can only be understood in terms of the context. The word matrix literally means that which gives birth to like a womb and in this intercultural context it predicates the milieu before comprehension. In group-analytic terms it can be seen as the interconnecting web of relationships that give meaning to the material as it emerges in the group. Peter Hobson (2003) further reinforces this idea when he says that without relationship there can be no thinking.

When I referred to the social unconscious, I realise now that many people might have assumed I was talking about the collective unconscious. The social unconscious is something different. Erich Fromm (2002) first used the term to explain that as our families reflect our society and culture, we soak them up with our mother's milk. They are so ubiquitous that we usually forget that our society has just one of an infinite number of ways of dealing with the issues of life leading us to think that our way of doing things is the only way, the natural way and it has been learned so well that it has all become unconscious - the social unconscious. Fromm pointed out that we may believe that we are acting according to our own free will but it is more likely that we are following powerful directives that are so proverbial we no longer notice them. Interestingly Fromm believes that our social unconscious is best understood by examining our economic systems. He defines five personality types, which he calls orientations, in economic terms!

Dalal (2002) and Hopper (2003) have both written about the consequences of the impact of power exerted by the social unconscious on the construction of our individual psyches as well as our interpersonal relations. In terms of the large group, the social unconscious is an important concept because it describes the social forces that exist outside of our conscious awareness that inhibit our capacity to think freely and creatively and to institute social change. Unless we regularly move out of our prevailing social, cultural and political contexts, we are caught in a self-perpetuating recursive cycle that

restricts the perceptions and possibilities we can have about the world far beyond the restrictions of our individual family psychic legacies.

On cultural clashes

When cultures clash it is inevitable that we will hurt each other. In most of the world we Europeans are hampered by our colonising past and in New Zealand, it is no different for Pākehā. Whether we like it or not, we are all inheritors of a racist history. Racism is bound into our language and stories. We will inevitably insult despite ourselves. The important thing is to make space to bridge the gaps that will emerge. By thinking about what is happening it is possible to find a shared understanding of our different meanings through a developing dialogue. We will become aware of our assumptions and how they are embedded in our culture and constrain the way we think. Most of us are aware of how our families have constrained our thinking but most of us are less aware of how the social unconscious also constrains us. Values are differently constructed according to the culture we emerge from.

In this conference there were clashes of many cultures. Not only Māori and Pākehā but also the hui and the Group-Analytic large group, Aotearoa New Zealanders and people from overseas. There was also humanistic psychotherapy and dynamic psychotherapy and thinking and feeling and others. All these different ways of seeing and living in the world were all mixed up in giant cauldron of assumptions about how things should proceed. It is difficult to believe that all these differences can all have their time and place and that no one, needs to be privileged over the other but it takes time and patience to work that out. It takes time to spot the assumptions that frame our belief systems and drive our behaviour. It takes time and not a little bravery to see that there are other ways to live and work.

Some days after the conference, I received an email criticising me for not setting up a confidentiality agreement at the beginning. I was puzzled at first because this was not the first large group that we have had at an NZAP conference and I could not work out what had made this one different. Then, I realised that it was an example of a cultural clash that could not be talked about in the group. I began to wonder what it might mean when we say after the event that we ought to have had a confidentiality agreement. The group has a social context so what might privacy, secrecy or discretion mean here. My first thought was that, in British society and I suspect it is much the same in New Zealand, there is a tendency to keep secrets inappropriately or to turn a blind eye to abuse that often goes on around us. Most of us feel embarrassed about confronting it and often lose sight of the fact that we have a duty of

care to those children or women who are being beaten or worse. Information that should be shared is kept split up into sealed packages. As a result many children, at least in Britain, have had the much-needed care of the state withheld and have died because no one dared to speak.

At the time of the conference, two important and connected political events were filling the newspapers. The first was Sue Bradford's so-called anti-smacking law, which of course was no such thing. It was creating such an enormous furore that even school children were marching against it. With one of the highest levels of domestic and child abuse in the world[25] it made me wonder how a society could mishear and misunderstand the bill's purpose and be so antagonistic to the basic human right that no human being should hit another. Over the same period, a high profile court case found senior police not guilty of gang rape only to discover afterwards that they had already been found guilty of multiple rapes in the past. Abuse and rape within families and society go to the heart of the history of colonisation as men lose their mana and women and children suffer the consequences (Brody, 2005).

Both of these events going on in parallel with our conference were shameful and perhaps there was a thought that I as the representative of the crown should not see or hear such shameful episodes representing life in New Zealand. So, a request to ensure that the events in this large group should remain confidential had the feel of a court injunction or gagging order! In fact after this criticism, I lost my voice and much of my capacity to think for weeks afterwards.

Large groups, as places where social assumptions and differences are revealed and negotiated, do not preclude participants from meeting afterwards and talking. In fact participants need to do a lot of talking to digest and make sense of the experience. Inappropriately applied, such agreements for confidentiality lead to a false sense of safety so that a mutual respect is not adequately worked out. I know that there are group facilitation styles that approach the group differently but my experience has been that it is important to stay with the inevitable anxiety provoked by, what can sometimes feel like, a yawning space. Allowing that inevitable early silence and letting the process evolve organically, although much more difficult, means that group members arrive at a profound place of knowing each other through the newly evolved shared context. Although it can be eased, there is no short cut to this process. We just have to sit with it and wait for ordinary human beings to dare to tell each other their ordinary human stories.

Some concluding thoughts

This paper has been written from my perspective as the conductor of the group. As Foulkes explained, a conductor is not a 'leader' but one who refrains from leading. The group-analytic conductor encourages, through a constantly enquiring reflective 'group-analytic attitude', a free-floating communication. At the same time, she accepts unconscious projections of an omnipotent primordial leader who is expected to deliver magical help. Instead of fulfilling this regressive need, she uses it to enable the group "to replace submission by co-operation between equals" (Foulkes, 1984, p. 65). In the large group these unconscious forces are extremely powerful as history can demonstrate. One of the reasons Foulkes did not use the term leader was because of his experience as a refugee from Hitler. Paradoxically Führer means guide as well as leader in German!

The intention is that everybody will learn to make use of this 'group-analytic attitude' to listen to each other carefully in a non-judgmental, free-floating, non-directive and non-manipulative way. Foulkes referred to this mode as free-floating communication. It is an important concept because it enables free speech. As the conductor I am in the group and part of the group. I feel it, and into it, using my 'self' to intuitively tune into what is happening. At the same time I occupy a meta-position from where I pay attention to the many levels of experience, my own and in the group in the service of the group to help us all make sense of what is happening. It is a joint enterprise.

In this conference and in the preparations, it was extremely difficult to make sense of what was happening at the time. It is only now, more than three months later as a result of continuous thinking, reading and writing that I have begun to uncover the layers of 'sweet-smelling jasmine' that strangled my thinking processes. I had more than 'forty days in the wilderness' trying to cope with an excruciating pain that I could not disentangle until now. What were the driving forces for these powerful projections and why was it so easy for me to identify with them?

Writing about the transmission of trauma, Volkan (2002, p. 41) uses the example of the Navajo, who like the Māori, were decimated as a result of their encounter with Europeans. "Those who survived were doomed to pass down their memory of the tragedy and their feelings about it to their descendants as if later generations could carry out the mourning and adaptation that their ancestors could not". Remember Turiana Turia's comments quoted earlier! In our large group, we had descendants of both perpetrators and victims trying to deal with their joint heritage. We had Māori, still very aware of their secondary position in New Zealand society, and Pākehā, not wanting to give

up their dominance in the presence of the 'Crown'. Not surprisingly, we were finding it almost impossible to talk to each other about our experiences in this bicultural country. What we tried to do was more than courageous and needed a lot more time to begin to create a context that could feel safe-enough and where we could begin to understand each other.

Last night I watched an episode of Victoria's Empire on British TV. The beginning was set in Aotearoa New Zealand and included a filmed encounter between two men, one Pākehā and the other Māori on talk-back radio. The Pākehā was expressing shockingly racist ideas. Victoria Wood was incredulous. "You can't say that on the radio can you?" The whole episode reinforced my impression that the social milieu in New Zealand appears to be laden with forbidden thoughts and feelings about biculturalism that do not usually have direct expression. In this atmosphere where the overt intention was to talk and the covert intention was not to talk, my suggestion to speak about these things was also breaking a taboo. As I write I remember again that weaving our living stories was the whole purpose of the conference.

My own history as the daughter of a German Jewish refugee means that I know what it is to be the inheritor of a trauma. I also know how it feels to be Pākehā and a European with a privileged background. These two legacies together with my now living in the UK positioned me almost exactly in the right place to find myself being the container for what is still unthinkable and undiscussable. It is no wonder that I carried so much with me back to Europe. The strength of what I was left with tells me that it is now more important than ever to provide a thinking space to begin the necessary shared mourning and reconciliation process. Volkan (ibid, p. 37) describes how the work of joint mourning must go on. Such a process helps with assimilating and adapting to the new situation where hundreds of memories need to be examined and the feelings associated with them felt.

While it is still too painful to be contemplated together, the 'gap' or abyss between Māori and Pākehā, originally enshrined in the Treaty of Waitangi, is likely to be unconsciously passed to whoever sits where I sat, to hold. Until this 'gap' can be consciously talked about in the community and the cross currents of history freshly navigated, it will continue to live on in the shadows making any joint living and working difficult. As Wedde, (2001, p. 114) makes clear, it is time "To inhabit each other's[26] histories and confront difference". It is terrifying and difficult to think about what it really means to pay more than lip service to biculturalism because it involves a willingness to take responsibility to allow the possibility for an in between space to be opened up for thinking. In the end there will be no way of avoiding it and there is no

time like the present. As Māori tikanga tells us, "the past is expressed as being located in front of us" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 16). We have no alternative but to find the courage to encounter the past together as gently as possible. I know of no better place than a large group community that can commit despite the inevitable pain.

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(Endnotes)

[i] Päkehä: Aotearoa New Zealander of European descent; Western; foreign; foreigner (usually applied to white people).

[ii] Powhiri: Opening ceremony and welcome conducted according to Maori protocol

[iii] Projective Identification is a clinical enactment that occurs around difficult nodal points at the deepest levels of our psychic organisation. It keeps close company with the repetition compulsion while it simultaneously and paradoxically contains potential for something new to be experienced in the context of the old. It occurs at the intersection between the seemingly impenetrable bulwark built against intolerable psychic pain and attempts to communicate it. By resisting the pressure to think and behave in a particular way demanded by the 'projector', the 'recipient' is in a position to psychologically process the projected feelings and return them to the 'projector' to be re-internalised (Greatrex, 2002: 1-2). This paper focuses on the projective processes that resulted from traumatic nodal points at the deepest levels of the social psyche in Aotearoa New Zealand that were placed in the group conductor.

[iv] Whakawatea: Clearing the way

[v] Hui: A meeting or gathering together of people for a specific reason using Maori protocol.

[vi] Tikanga: Customs

[vii] Te Reo: The language

[viii] Ngati Porou: Name and place of an Iwi [Maori tribe]

[ix] Mihi: A greeting

[x] Hikoi: A journey on foot together

[xi] Whakawhanaunatanga: Building a relationship

[xii] Poroporoaki: saying goodbye

[xiii] Waiata: Song or chant

[xiv] Aotearoa: The land of the long white cloud is the Maori name for New Zealand. It is often used now as a way of reminding us that it is a bicultural country.

[xv] Kaumätua: Senior and highly respected Maori elder man

[xvi] Mana: Authority, influence, prestige, power or psychic force" (Sullivan, 2001:28).

[xvii] Kuia: Senior and respected highly Maori elder woman

[xviii] Tangi: To cry; the mourning of the dead; also applies to the cry or call of a bird and the ringing of a bell.

[xix] "Family group conferencing (FGC) is a method of resolving, or attempting to resolve, family issues in relation to child protection. It brings together the family, the child and professionals to meet and develop a plan for future action. FGC began in New Zealand in the late 1980s, growing out of Maori cultural practice, and spread to many countries across the world through the 1990s. Its use in Australia is now legally supported in a number of states, but it has not become a part of mainstream practice among most child protection agencies."

[xx] Stunde Null: Zero hour

[xxi] Marae: It is the family home of generations that have gone before. It is t e standing place of the present generations and will be the standing place for the generations to come. It is the place of greatest mana, the place of greatest spirituality and the place where Maori customs are given ultimate expression.

[xxii] Turangawaewae: Standing place

[xxiii] Käwanatanga: Governance

[xxiv] S.H. Foulkes: Developed Group-Analysis after the second world war as a result of his experiences with shell shocked soldiers at Northfield Hospital which was the first Therapeutic Community.

[xxv] During Dec 2005 and Jan 2006, Police attended nearly 11,000 family violence instances - there is one incident every 8 minutes (www.preventingviolence.org.nz)

[xxvi] Italics mine